



Organizing the School Year: A Monthly Principal Checklist

Why go this route?

- The Principal will be more effective by being organized, proactive and efficient and therefore be free to spend more time on instructional leadership.
- The checklist will serve as a master plan to insure that important building/district activities are completed.
- Using a checklist helps principals be systematic about closing the gap between what we know and what we do.

You'll know you've arrived when...

- Meetings and activities are completed in an organized and timely manner.
- Staff, parents and community routinely get personalized communications.
- Stakeholders are very familiar with what is going on in the school.
- The principal's day-to-day behaviors communicate that she/he has a firm grasp of the vision of the school and can translate it into programs and activities.
- The school climate reflects an organized, efficient and stress-free tone.

Construction Zone

- It takes time to be organized. Spending this time will save you time later.
- The more that can be completed before school starts in the fall, the better. Once the basic work is completed in August, the rest of the year will run more smoothly.
- Make sure to save copies of your packets, newsletters and letters. They can be modified and used again.



It's about TIME

- There are many activities included in this packet which take varying amounts of time to complete. Most need to take place before school starts in August.
- At the beginning of each month, transfer tasks from the month's list into your working calendar. This list is meant to organize principal's focus, so up to a half of each day should be devoted to them, while "fire-fighting" with the other half.




Potential COSTS

- Cost for copying of materials—budget for regular parent newsletters, staff calendars, etc.

The Process

*A step-by-step guide
to organizing your school
year via checklists*

NOTE: Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

1 Browse through all ten months of checklists.

Get yourself a cup of coffee and find somewhere you can think quietly and reflectively. Read INSERT for Step 1 as a note from the experienced principal-authors of this packet to you, the user. As you browse, customize the checklists; cross off any that don't apply to you, and highlight 3-4 each month that are your highest priorities.

2 Post the first month next to your desk.

Don't file it or put it in a pile of papers, find a place for it where your eye will rove over it as you talk on the phone or while you're scheduling your day. This is important in the middle of everything you do for everyone else. Keeping yourself on a chosen-track (and documenting your accomplishments) is something you can do for yourself.

3 File the checklists for the remaining months. Each month you'll trade the finished one for a clean one for the new month.

4 Assign tasks from this month's checklist to specific times in your monthly (weekly) calendar.

This is the step that keeps the checklists from becoming one more guilt-inducing "should." By picking a time, you are keeping faith with your intentions. Start modestly—perhaps you'll assign only your high priorities for the month. If possible you may add others from the checklist.

5 Protect the time firmly, but not rigidly.

No responsive principal ever executes a day exactly as planned. But when you see that you've made a date with yourself for Checklist Work, begin to think of it as roughly the same priority as, say, a parent conference – not like a summons from the superintendent or an emergency, but serious business for which you'll turn other things away because these things ARE your job, and other people can't do theirs if you don't do these. When something does shove them off your plan for the day, reschedule to another specific time.

6 Check them off the list when they're done!

Enjoy the reward. Letting the checks visibly accumulate is a quiet way to celebrate to yourself (whenever your eye falls on the list) that you are making your priorities a reality.

7 Think ahead to next year.

As you develop handouts or announcements or flyers to implement the steps on any given month's checklist, put a file copy into a folder marked with the month. At the end of the month, as you replace the checklist with the next month's, take a minute to jot any "lessons learned" on the used checklist -- things you'd do differently next time. Tuck it into the folder and set that folder aside to be part of next year's series. When you take it out again, you'll have a head start.

Getting more mileage from organizing your school year

*How getting organized benefits your school
in regard to the following initiatives:*

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

- NCLB increases planning and reporting responsibilities, the importance of state testing and teacher requirements. Keeping up with these demands will require the utmost in organization. Having a systematic year-long plan into which you can insert things you have to do will help keep you from missing something important inadvertently. (No one can keep all this in his/her head.) Organization is the key.

Education YES!

- Filing your school report card on time is the principal's responsibility, even though he/she needs to keep in mind that team input is important. A year-long plan can ensure that you know what should be getting done all along the way instead of at the last minute.

MI-Plan

- Step 1, page 8 contains a planning calendar for MI-PLAN Steps. This calendar outlines the 8 steps for a typical school improvement process, using MI-PLAN's model. Each step includes: a title, a product/outcome and an approximate timeframe. Incorporate your School Improvement calendar into MI-Map's overview of other spinning plates you'll also need to keep in the air.



Resources

Books

The Principal's Book of Lists

Robert Ramsey. 2002.
John Wiley & Sons.

This information source is packed with the most used and useful lists available to help Principals work smarter and faster in many aspects of the job as a school administrator.

The Elementary School Principal's Calendar: A Month by Month Planner for the School Year

Michael Terc and Ida Ayers.
Sage Press, 2001

The Middle School Principal's Calendar

Michael Terc and Robert Ricken.
Sage Press, 2003

These books lay out everyday challenges and administrative necessities to help plan strategically for the academic year. A handy checklist for each month is included along with a rich resource of sample documents to help with communication.

Gardening in the Minefield: A Survival Guide for School Administrators

Schmidt, Laurel

This book uses insight and humor to give creative, practical strategies for surviving the daily grind, while honing a vision of a school that works. Topics include: mastering the communication glut and nurturing productive relationships.

NCLB Planning Calendar

Michigan Association of State and Federal Program Specialists (MAS/FPS) 24403 Crowley, Taylor. MI 48180-8102 www.masfps.org.

A calendar laying out the planning and reporting deadlines for NCLB and Title I funding.

Associations

National Association of Elementary School Principals
<http://www.naesp.org>

National Association of Secondary School Principals
<http://www.nassp.org>

People

Coaches

The *Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools* website lists coaches whose training has been provided by Michigan State University and supported by the Michigan Department of Education. Some are active in leadership development in Michigan schools. Please visit:

www.abcscoaches.org

Primary Authors for this MI-Map Packet

Betty Underwood
Partner Educator
Office of School Improvement

Ron Collins
Partner Educator
Office of School Improvement

MI-Map Coordinator/Editor

Joann Neuroth
Changing Horses
neurothj@aol.com

For more information, contact

Office of School Improvement
Michigan Department of Education
517/241-4285

Michigan State Board of Education

Kathleen N. Straus, President
Herbert S. Moyer, Vice President
Carolyn L. Curtin, Secretary
John C. Austin, Treasurer
Marianne Yared McGuire, NASBE Delegate
Elizabeth W. Bauer
Reginald M. Turner
Eileen Lappin Weiser

Ex-Officio

Jennifer M. Granholm, Governor
Thomas D. Watkins, Jr., Superintendent of Public Instruction

Compliance With Federal Law

The Michigan Department of Education complies with all Federal laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination, and with all requirements and regulations of the U.S. Department of Education.